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SUBJECT Interview With David MacMichael

SANDI FREEMAN: The debate on the Reagan Administration's policy in Central America has been growing as election time draws near. And new ammunition was added recently by David C. MacMichael, a former CIA analyst who was working on Central America. He came out strongly against Reagan policy there and he's convinced that the evidence the United States is using to justify its presence in Central America is nonexistent.

Mr. MacMichael is my guest tonight in our Washington Bureau, along with Raymond Bonner in our Los Angeles Bureau. Mr. Bonner is a reporter and author of Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy in El Salvador."

And also in Washington is Dr. Mark Falkoff (?), resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, specializing in Latin American policy issues.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for being with us this evening.

First I'm going to go to you, Mr. MacMichael. Why did you leave your job with the CIA, and why did you speak out now?

DAVID MACMICHAEL: All right. In answer to the two parts of your question, I was a CIA employee on a two-year contract, which was completed in April of 1983. And the contract was not renewed, and I left.

In answer to the second part of your question, why I'm

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speaking out now. I've spent the time since I left further examining the question which had absorbed me during my time in the Central Intelligence Agency, and that is the justification, the evidence for the Administration's policy vis-a-vis Nicaragua. And my consideration of this, my study of it, my observations within Nicaragua, my discussions with other people convinced me that the present policy is indeed wrong, it is producing a great amount of destruction with Nicaragua itself, and its justification is based on what I believe to be very much insufficient evidence. And I believe that during this election year, as you point out, the situation should be examined fully by the American people. And the evidence, the charges by the Administration should be placed out and fully justified, or the support for the so-called Contra war down there be abandoned.

FREEMAN: You had just said that you feel that the evidence is insufficient for the Reagan Administration's actions there. Is your evidence sufficient?

MACMICHAEL: Well, what I'm speaking of is an examination of the evidence which the Reagan Administration has relied upon.

And I first want to enter a caveat here. As you know, I'm bound by the secrecy agreement which I signed when I served with the Central Intelligence Agency, and I can not and will not refer to specific intelligence, nor will I identify individuals with whom I served as I respond to that.

FREEMAN: But in coming forth and speaking out at this time, you have said that you feel that there was definitely a lack of evidence to support the Reagan Administration's policies in Central America, specifically towards Nicaragua, as far as being a way station for arms. Tell us more, as much as you can, anyway. What led you to believe that there was no reason for this kind of action?

MACMICHAEL: Well, as you know, Miss Freeman, the situation is this: Certainly between the fall of 1980 and the spring of 1981, as is acknowledged by the Nicaraguan government, is well known, Nicaraguan territory and Nicaraguan government personnel were involved in the transshipment of arms which came from various places in the world to the insurgents in El Salvador. When the present Administration came into power, as noted, for example, by former Secretary of State Haig in his recent volume of memoirs, Caveat, this Nicaraguan involvement was made a very strong point, a demarche by the United States to Nicaragua. And since the early spring of 1981, when the evidence was indeed abundant and readily available for analysts to observe and comment upon, it has simply disappeared.

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Further, we may note that in this long period of time since then, three years, there has not been one single seizure of any arms shipment identified as coming from Nicaragua to El Salvaodr.

And I would suggest, very frankly, that this record, this amount of evidence does not support the Administration's charges of a continuing massive flow of arms from Nicaragua into El Salvador and the reliance of the El Salvadoran insurgency on this flow of arms.

FREEMAN: Now, you worked with the CIA as an analyst in Central America from '81 to '83. You mentioned that earlier. Do you feel that that was really enough time for you to fully understand what was going on there?

MACMICHAEL: Miss Freeman, I did not come into that position with no background in the matter of insurgency. I had spent some years in Southeast Asia as -- on a Department of Defense contract studying insurgency, and, as a matter of fact, had specialized in the study of support systems for insurgencies.

And one of the things that distressed me, disturbed me greatly at the time the decision was made to support the Contra war, ostensibly to interdict this flow of arms, is I learned that none of the preliminary studies and analyses about the insurgents' supply system, its means for delivering weapons, types of weapons, the significance of the alleged arms for the conduct of the insurgency at various levels, the means of delivery, the --everything connected with this, which in my experience necessarily undergirds an effort such as we then embarked upon, had not been done, and to my knowledge still has not been done.

FREEMAN: You mentioned that you left the CIA in 1983 when your contract was not renewed. Would you have stayed if they had renewed your contract?

MACMICHAEL: I would have preferred to stay and fight the issue from within. Yes, I would have.

FREEMAN: And was any reason given to you why the contract wasn't renewed?

MACMICHAEL: I was informed that, at that time, that my work was not up to the standard which had been expected when I was hired, and so my contract was not renewed.

FREEMAN: What is your opinion?

MACMICHAEL: Oh, I think I did great work. I always do.

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FREEMAN: [Laughter] What is your opinion why they didn't renew the contract?

MACMICHAEL: You know, I really can't comment on what other people's motives are. I know from some comments that have been made that I had made, let us say, a pest of myself in pressing this issue. But I can't say that tha was the reason why my contract was not renewed or extended.

FREEMAN: After you left the CIA you visited Nicaragua. What did you find there as compared to what you were reading in the documents that went past your desk every day in regards to Nicaragua?

MACMICHAEL: Well, I didn't find any -- you know, I can't, once again, comment on the documents themselves. What I will say is that what I found in Nicaragua, which I think most visitors to Nicaragua find -- and it is a very open country, as you know. It welcomes North Americans and anyone else who wants to come there -- is that it is very far from being the tyrannical police state which is portrayed in the statements of Administration leaders in this country.

FREEMAN: And what do you expect to accomplish by going public now? Is it the campaign? Is it the election year? Is that the purpose for coming forward now?

MACMICHAEL: The timing of the election year certainly plays a great part in it. Miss Freeman, I really regard the Administration policy vis-a-vis Nicaragua, and in Central America generally, as a very mistaken policy. It has already involved the United States quite openly, and I think to its loss in diplomatic -- in international standing, and the support of a very nasty and dirty war within Nicaragua which would not exist were the United States not paying for it.

The incident of the mining of the harbors, for example, was not one of the bright chapters in current American foreign policy.

So, what I would like to do, through coming forward at this time, is to force an open debate on the issue, because I simply, as I say, cannot accept on the basis of the evidence, with which I believe I'm very familiar, the hyperbolic and extreme statements of the Administration about Nicaragua and its relation to the insurgency in El Salvador.

FREEMAN: Dr. Falkoff, you've been listening to what my guest has been having to say. And let me have your response to your reaction.

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MARK FALKOFF: Well, Dave and I are pretty good friends. I've known him since I came to Washington about two and a half years ago.

MACMICHAEL: Nice to see you again, Mark.

FALKOFF: Nice to see you.

Some of the things which Dave says he has said to me over brunch tables and lunch tables and over drinks, and I was sufficiently concerned about some of them to take them up with some friends of mine. One particular friend of mine -- I think, probably, you know which one I mean, Dave -- who was a high CIA official. But I'm not totally surprised, then, that he's saying these things now, although I have a slightly different recollection of some of the things -- these are conversations that are about two years old, in some cases.

I remember when we talked about the Nicaraguan situation and the Contras, Dave made rather strong representations to me that this was just making the Nicaraguans -- or, rather, the Sandinistas look good internationally. It was making people feel sorry for them. It was attracting attention from the rather nasty things that they were doing on their own society.

I guess I would disagree with Dave in his impressions of Nicaragua. I too was there fairly recently. I would agree that it is certainly not a totalitarian Marxist-Leninist dictatorship yet. It is certainly not a democracy. I would describe it as a kind of left-wing variant of a Central American police state, which doesn't mean it doesn't have considerable popular support. But then so did Somoza for part of his role.

What concerns many of my friends in Nicaragua -- and I'm thinking particularly of one gentleman who is the managing editor of La Prensa, the opposition paper. His view was, "Yes, it's true this isn't a Marxist-Leninist police state yet. But they are training their cadres. They will have them in place in the future. This net will eventually fall over us. This is really like Cuba in 1960 or '61."

That may be overblown on his part. It was something to make me kind of pause and think about what kind of an animal are we dealing with here.

FREEMAN: ...Administration's are absolutely the proper ones at this point in time.

FALKOFF: Excuse me?

FREEMAN: Do you feel that the Reagan Administration's

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policies are correct and should be followed now?

FALKOFF: Let me put it this way. The Nicaraguan government made two promises to the OAS at the time it took power. One was nonalignment and the other was free elections. Now the Reagan Administration says that its policy of supporting the Contras is intended to get the Sandinista government to honor its commitments to the OAS.

Now, many people say this isn't true, the Reagan Administation's trying to overthrow this government.

Now, whether that is true or not is almost irrelevant. Because if the Nicaraguan government does honor its commitments to the OAS, the wafer-thin majority by which the Administration in the House of Representatives has gotten authorization for aid to the Contras will dissolve and disappear. And if those elections are held and they're real elections under international supervision -- and I'm not sure that the Sandinistas won't win those elections. But the fact that they're held in a proper democratic fashion means that there will be a role for the opposition in Nicaraguan political life. And that's an outcome that I would regard as a good one. And as I've often said, if it isn't what the Administration is secretly seeking, or really seeking, its an outcome that the Administration, this one or any one, could happily live with.

FREEMAN: Dr. Falkoff, Mr. MacMichael, we'll return after these words. And when we do we'll be joined in our conversation by Mr. Bonner in Los Angeles.

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FREEMAN: Mr. Bonner, Raymond Bonner, who is a correspondent for the New York Times and author of Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy in El Salvador, please join our conversation from our Los Angeles Bureau. You've been listening to what my other two guests have had to say to Mr. MacMichael and to Dr. Falkoff. Give us your opinion.

RAYMOND BONNER: Well, thank you, Sandi.

I think what Mr. MacMichael is saying is basically --what he's now saying publicly is what we reporters have been hearing privately from other intelligence analysts for quite some time. And basically, that is that there's simply no evidence to support the charges of massive arms support from Nicaragua or Cuba for the guerrillas in El Salvador; that, in fact, the source of most of the weapons for the Salvadoran guerrillas is the United States Army, the United States Government, because the weapons are sent to the Salvadoran Army, the soldiers then

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surrender, turning over their weapons to the guerrillas. Or, in some cases, there have been reports that Salvadoran officers have simply sold the U.S. weapons to the guerrillas.

So, I think what Mr. [Mac]Michael has done is to now say publicly what many of us have long suspected, that there just isn't the evidence.

FREEMAN: And Mr. MacMichael, you have come forward now. What kinds of repercussions, if any, are you receiving?

MACMICHAEL: I haven't received any repercussions, particularly. I expect that I will hear from some people on this.

I would like to get back to Mark's comments. And one thing I'm not going to do is get into a debate with as competent and able a political scientist as Mark is on the exact nature of the current Nicaraguan regime. However, I do want, you know, to bring the focus of this back to this issue of the so-called massive arms flow from Nicaragua, on which Mr. Bonner has just commented so ably, and to, you know, point out that if this is the justification for the U.S. Government's support of the Contras and, as Mark indicates, that the real purpose of the United States, in supporting the Contras, is to force them to live up to the promises made to the OAS in 1979 in a manner satisfactory to the United States Government, it seems foolhardy, at most, to expect to beat them into it by using precisely those most despised elements of the old Somoza regime, and that is the remnants and former leaders of the National Guard.

FREEMAN: Dr. Falkoff?

FALKOFF: Well, part of that is true, Dave. But on the other hand, I doubt the 14,000 peasants and small-business people, and so on, that are fighting under General Bermudez are doing so because they want to install a new Somoza.

The other thing is, you still have to, and I still have to, account for the phenomenon of the Arde (?) and Eden Pastora, who is far from Somozistas, we know, and is in fact refusing to take aid from the CIA or to work closely with the United States. It's no secret that Eden Pastora is not a favorie of the Reagan Administration. He is distrusted and disliked, in fact, but some of those people. And yet he is continuing to fight, and claims he will continue to do so regardless of what happens with the FDN.

So, I guess the reason that I don't buy into that whole thing is that I wonder how we explain away the phenomenon of Arde and Eden Pastora and his people.

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FREEMAN: And Mr. MacMichael?

MACMICHAEL: Well, it is clear that Eden Pastora is a phenomenon and he is very hard to explain or explain away. He is unique. As you know, when he originally broke with the Sandinista government, his first port of call was Cuba. He announced -- at first it appeared to many people that he was emulating the late Che Guevara, that he was prepared to draw his revolutionary sword for the overthrow of tyranny elsewhere in Central America. I believe he at one time offered to head the movement against the Guatemalan government, head the insurgency in Guatemala. And he bounced back and forth for quite a while until he finally settled on his present course. He is indeed a phenomenon.

FREEMAN: Gentlemen, we have to take this last timeout.

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FREEMAN: Welcome back. I have just enough time to thank all of my guests....

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